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# The Library of the New York Public Service Commission

First District

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Public Service Commission, First District

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## THE LIBRARY OF THE NEW YORK PUBLIC SERVICE COMMISSION.

### First District.

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The Public Service Commission for the First District, has jurisdiction in New York City over gas and electric companies, railroads and street railroads, including under the Rapid Transit Act the laying out of rapid transit routes, the preparation and supervision of contracts for construction and operation, and in certain cases the granting of franchises. The surface, elevated and subway companies in New York City carry annually over 1,300,000,000 passengers, which exceeds by more than 66 per cent. the total number of passengers carried on the steam railroads of the entire country. The gas companies of the city produce more than 20 per cent. of the entire gas output of the United States.

The problems coming before the commission in relation to rates, service, equipment and subway construction are numerous and important, and involve in many cases the working out of new methods and the laying down of policies of tremendous importance. The commission has a staff of over 600 employees. About 300 of these are the engineers, draftsmen and inspectors engaged directly in the work of subway planning and construction. The commission has drawn into its service highly trained statisticians, economists, accountants, lawyers and engineers of all kinds.

As a tool for the use of this large organization it has established an office library. The library is intended to be a working office collection of books, pamphlets and periodical articles needed in the current work of the commission and in the consideration of the various questions that come before it. The library aims to collect and index material in such a thorough and scientific way that when information is wanted in relation to car brakes, gas meters, franchise terms, Paris subways, etc., the material from which the desired information may be secured will be at hand. The library now contains some 2,600 volumes and 5,400 pamphlets, making the total collection 8,000.

**Selection and Collection of Material:** In a special office library, great care must be taken in the selection and collection of material. Selection must be exhaustive but discriminating. All possible sources must be searched for useful material, but just as great care must be exercised to exclude material not needed. The efficiency of the collection is reduced by every useless book it

contains. It is often a doubtful question as to whether a particular book should be added to the collection, and an even more troublesome question as to whether a book now on the shelves should be discarded. The librarian must use his best judgment. He will make mistakes both in original selection and in discarding, but it must be done.

In the library of the Public Service Commission we examine regularly the Publisher's Weekly, and the lists of the United States and parliamentary publications. We get track of most of the books and pamphlets desired, however, by a rather careful perusal of a number of technical journals that relate to public utilities. Among the most important are Electric Railway Journal, Light Railway and Tramway Journal, Electrical World, Engineering News, Progressive Age. Here we find references to the annual reports of the various public utility companies of American and European cities and to many printed papers and special reports, official or unofficial, relating to public utilities. The lists published by Stone & Webster and the current bibliographies in the Journal of Political Economy and American Political Science Review and the Economic Quarterly are also useful. Much material has been obtained by writing directly to American consuls and to the public officers and company officials in the large cities of the world.

But as important as are the books, the pamphlets and special reports, they are out-ranked in value by the periodical article. In the numerous general, economic, law and technical periodicals of this and other countries there are many articles of the utmost importance in the routine work of the commission, and in the consideration of the various problems that come before it. The library receives some 25 periodicals that are systematically examined, for articles and material of use to the commission. In addition we examine the index to legal literature contained in the Law Library Journal, the Readers' Guide to Periodical Literature and most important of all, the Engineering Index. The Engineering Index is a monthly annotated index of the more important articles appearing in some 200 American and European technical journals. The publishers of the Index undertake to supply copies of the articles listed. This is a great convenience, especially in securing copies of articles in foreign periodicals. As soon as the Index is received it is checked up and an order sent in for copies of all the articles of special interest.

**Classification.** A special library will usually require a special classification. The standard classifications are all right for the smaller public libraries. Standard classifications have been specially designed to meet the requirements of a general collec-

tion. They are usually a sad misfit when applied to a special library. The special working collection is intended to serve very definite needs and is required to answer certain definite problems. The purpose of the classification is to aid in supplying desired information with speed and certainty. The resources of the library must be classified around the special problems that are to be solved. "Close" classification is also essential. There should be a special heading or subheading in the classification for practically every subject, no matter how minute, concerning which information will be frequently wanted.

The classification that we have worked out in the library of the Public Service Commission is extremely simple. The broad subjects are arranged alphabetically. Subheadings are arranged alphabetically under the main heading. States and countries are arranged alphabetically, and cities alphabetically under the state or country. The alphabet is much in evidence. The scheme has the advantage of fitting in well with an alphabetic catalogue.

A feature of the classification is the system of uniform interchangeable headings and subheadings. Certain subheadings are used uniformly under each of the main utility headings and certain main headings are used also as subheadings. Thus "Accidents" appears as a main heading and also as a subheading under "Gas," "Electricity," "Transit," "Railroads," etc.

The notation used in the classification is a combination of letters and figures. Letters of the alphabet are used to represent all headings other than regional; e. g., Fr, Franchise; Ra, Railroad; Ga, Gas, etc. Regional headings are represented by Arabic numerals. States and countries are always designated by 2 figures and cities by 3 figures. These numbers are read as decimals, though the decimal point is uniformly omitted; e. g., 401 Boston follows 40 Massachusetts and precedes 41 Michigan. The same notation means the same thing wherever it occurs. Ac always means Accidents, whether as a main heading or as a subheading; e. g., Ac, Accidents; GaAc, Gas-Accidents; RaAc, Railroads-Accidents, etc. The same number is always used for a given city or country wherever it occurs in the classification; Ga401, Gas-Boston; Ra401, Railroads-Boston, etc.

The above are some of the main features of the classification. They are subject, however, to numerous elaborations, modifications and exceptions.

**Arrangement of Material:** All magazines, clippings and pamphlets are kept in large vertical file drawers. The clippings are usually placed in manila folders. They are arranged under exactly the same headings as the books on the shelves. Under each heading they are arranged chronologically

according to year of publication. Each article or pamphlet has a separate file number, corresponding to the book number in the case of volumes on the shelves.

Of the 25 periodicals received, only 6 are bound. Articles of interest from periodicals that we do not bind are clipped, put in folders and placed in the vertical file drawers. The same treatment is also applied to the numerous special copies of periodicals not taken regularly, but which are purchased because they contain some article of interest. The vertical file drawers keep the material free from dust and offer a maximum of convenience in consultation. The material is compact and can be easily and quickly consulted.

**Catalogue.** The card catalogue is in three main divisions, each alphabetically arranged:

First—Author and title.

Second—Subject headings.

Third—Regional headings.

The subject headings used in the classification are retained in the catalogue and used in their various combinations. Magazine articles and pamphlets are catalogued just as fully as books, and the cards for the articles are placed in the catalogue with the cards for the books. Chapters or parts of books relating to specific subjects are separately catalogued. A feature of the catalogue is the complete entry under the regional heading. Every subject entry relating to a particular city or country is duplicated under the city or country heading. We find it a great convenience to be able to find everything we have relating to Paris, for example, together under that heading.

We try to realize that it is not so much particular books or sets of books that we need to classify and index as it is the specific information contained in the books. Our catalogue is not used nearly so frequently to find the location of a particular book as it is to find information in regard to some particular subject. The more specialized a library becomes the more important, as well as practicable it becomes to classify and index information rather than books or sets of books.

**Bulletins and Publicity:** A library bulletin is issued once or twice a week containing references to current books, articles and pamphlets received by the library. Each bulletin is a single sheet. It is mimeographed and sent out to about 250 officers and employes of the Commission. The person receiving the bulletin checks in the margin the books or articles he desires to see, signs his name to the sheet and returns it to the library. On receipt of this sheet at the library, the book or article desired is sent if available, and if not, the name of the applicant is placed on a reserve list. Often it seems desirable to bring a particular article or book to the special attention of some



officer or employe. To do this the item in question is stamped in red with a rubber stamp marked "special" on the copy sent to the particular person in question. An article or book that will probably be of interest to but one or two or three persons is omitted from the bulletin and is sent directly to the individuals interested with a blank form stating that it is being transmitted for inspection and the request to return as soon as possible. In these ways we attempt to carry out the recognized function of the office library, that of bringing promptly to the attention of the officers and employes of the Commission the new books and the articles of interest in connection with their official duties.

The bulletin is a notable success in directly increasing the use of the library. It also has a publicity feature. It is a constant reminder of the existence of the Library and of the nature of the material that may be found there. The office library is an innovation and the habit of turning to it for information must be acquired. Various forms of publicity should be resorted to, to aid the development of the library habit. I think we could and should do more in this direction than we have in the past.

**Reference Lists:** Numerous special reference lists are prepared from time to time on subjects of special interest. Our close classification, analytic catalogue entries and combined periodical and book catalogue make the preparation of special reference lists much simpler. Often all that is required is a straight copy of the catalogue entries.

**Blue Print Methods:** We are experimenting on a new form of catalogue that promises certain distinct advantages. The catalogue entries on each subject are arranged chronologically and copied on letter size onion skin paper. This makes a negative from which a blue print may be taken. A single sheet or sheets being devoted to each subject, it is possible to add future accessions to the original sheet without the necessity of recopying. We can thus have always an up-to-date catalogue on loose sheets. It is of course easier to consult a catalogue with five to twenty entries on each page than to finger over the cards in a card catalogue. Another advantage will be that we can make portions of the catalogue available in the various bureaus of the Commission. Thus we can supply the Franchise bureau with a loose leaf always up-to-date catalogue of franchise material, the bureau of Statistics and Accounts with a catalogue of accounts, finance and statistics, and similarly for the various other bureaus and departments. Another advantage will be that we can always supply a blue print copy of any part or parts of the catalogue. It seems probable that these will in large measure take the place of the special reference lists

that we have been preparing. A reference list is out of date as soon as it is made. The advantage of having available an always up-to-date list is evident.

**Collection of Information:** The library also compiles data on various subjects, and particularly in relation to public utility supervision and conditions in other states and cities. To a considerable extent, the qualifications essential for the scientific selection and collection of material are the same as those required for the compilation of the information contained in the material. These functions are therefore combined and the library, so far particularly as conditions in other states and cities are concerned, both collects and collates information. Thus detailed reports have been prepared in relation to the supervision of street railways in England and Prussia, the subway system of Paris and the laws and experience of various cities in relation to the indeterminate franchise and in relation to profit sharing as a method of franchise compensation. Numerous brief comparative statements have also been prepared. Much of our most valuable information has been drawn from the laws, methods and experience of the great cities of Europe.

I think that this combination of library work and collation or investigation is a practical one. The librarian gains an intimate knowledge of the contents of the material in his collection. His direct use of the material shows him the weak places in it and enables him to fill up the missing portions that are so absolutely essential to an efficient working collection. Active use of his collection helps the librarian, moreover, to get away from the habit of looking at the book as the unit of library work. It helps him to a realization that it is facts and information that it is his function to classify, arrange and make readily available rather than particular books or sets of books.

**Quick Service:** The necessity for quick service is a fundamental and all sufficient reason for the existence of the special library. Information to be of use in the every-day work of the world must be quickly available. Quick service multiplies use—this is as true of libraries as it is of transit systems. The importance of quick service should therefore condition and mould the entire organization of the special or office library, its classification, arrangement and cataloguing.

In the development of a special library emphasis needs to be laid on these two things: First, the necessity for quick service, and, second, that the service rendered is for the purpose of giving information and that the library is not merely dealing in copies or titles of books and articles. While we hold these ideals in the library of which I am speaking, we still lack much of their complete realization.